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LETTER DATED 18 JULY 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LEBANON TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of Lebanon has decided to request the Security Council to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which expires on 31 July 1996, for a further interim period of six months, on the basis of the provisions of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 501 (1982), 508 (1982), 509 (1982) and all other relevant resolutions and decisions of the Security Council.

The Government of Lebanon is pleased to report that the national reconstruction and rehabilitation process is proceeding. Efforts to rebuild a new commercial centre in downtown Beirut and to modernize the national infrastructure are ongoing. Priority has been given to basic services such as electricity, telecommunications, transportation, water works, schools and hospitals.

My Government is also pleased to report that the command of UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities continue to coordinate in perfect harmony with the goal of deploying the Lebanese Army throughout the southern part of the country up to its internationally recognized boundaries.

Despite the satisfactory economic performance and the progress and acceleration of reconstruction, Israel's continuous occupation of south Lebanon and its continued aggression against Lebanon and its citizens remain the major obstacle to comprehensive national recovery. The Israeli Army continues to shell villages and towns in Lebanon using fragmentation and nail bombs which are prohibited by international conventions.

It is most regrettable that Israel, despite its participation in the ongoing Middle East peace process launched in Madrid in October 1991, continues to attack Lebanon by land, sea and air.

Furthermore, Israel still refuses to release hundreds of innocent Lebanese detainees held for years in Israeli jails and the notorious detention camps in Al-Khiam and Marjayoun in south Lebanon, manned by the Israelis in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Many of the detainees are suffering from serious

diseases as a result of harsh living conditions, subjection to ill-treatment, and denial of medical care. Others have died in the camps or shortly after being released. The detainees have been subjected to physical and mental torture in further violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Lebanon remains wholly committed to the Middle East peace process in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Lebanon agreed to participate in the Peace Conference on the Middle East at Madrid and subsequent rounds of negotiations at Washington on the basis of resolution 425 (1978), as was confirmed by the letter of assurances dated 18 October 1991 from the Government of the United States of America, as co-sponsor of the Conference, to the Government of Lebanon. It was Lebanon's clear understanding that the Middle East peace process would provide the framework in which Israel would implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

In fact, Israeli forces launched repeated attacks against Lebanon, the most violent of which was the grave escalation of April 1996, provoking in its wake numerous innocent casualties, large-scale exodus of civilians and massive destruction of the Lebanese infrastructure.

In view of Israel's continued aggressions against Lebanon and their threat to the peace process, it must be underscored that the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) remains the only way to stop the violence in southern Lebanon. Towards this end, the Council could play a positive role in securing peace for the region by demonstrating the inviolability of its resolutions and undertaking long overdue measures to implement resolution 425 (1978). This would enable the Government of Lebanon to re-establish law and order throughout the entire south of the country by extending its authority up to its internationally recognized boundaries.

The Government of Lebanon considers that the operational strength and capacity of UNIFIL should be maintained, with a view to implementing resolution 425 (1978) fully. In this context, UNIFIL represents the international community's commitment to Lebanon and to the restoration of its full sovereignty and territorial integrity. Its support and humanitarian assistance are vital to the civilian population, but cannot be a substitute for the fulfilment of its original mandate as stipulated in resolution 425 (1978). UNIFIL's role as an interim force is to ensure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and to assist the Government of Lebanon in re-establishing its legitimate and effective authority in the area, through its army and internal security forces.

The Government of Lebanon avails itself of this opportunity to pay tribute to the UNIFIL command, administrators, troops and troop-contributing countries for their noble efforts and sacrifices made in the cause of peace. It expresses deep appreciation to the Secretary-General and his assistants for their tireless efforts, which contribute to the valuable presence of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon.

I would be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Samir MOUBARAK
Ambassador
Permanent Representative